

MEMORANDUM

TO: SENATOR TOM DASCHLE
FROM: PETER D. HART RESEARCH ASSOCIATES
DATE: NOVEMBER 20, 2003
SUBJECT: OLDER VOTERS' VIEW OF MEDICARE BILL

On November 17 and 18, Hart Research conducted a survey among 604 older voters (age 55 and over) on the Medicare bill emerging from the conference committee. As we reported yesterday, the survey shows that older voters generally have a very unfavorable reaction to the plan. For example, just 19% want Congress to approve the current bill, while 64% say Congress should go back and work on a better prescription drug benefit. There are also some important internal findings in the survey data that we wanted to share with you.

Rural Voters. First, older voters in rural areas voice a particularly strong opposition to this Medicare bill. Fully 71% say that Congress should go back to the drawing board and develop a better prescription drug plan, compared to 17% who want Congress to pass the current bill. Rural seniors seem particularly concerned about provisions that provide subsidies for Medicare managed care plans, as 70% express an unfavorable view of this policy (40% very unfavorable) when read competing arguments.

Supporters say that this will give seniors the same choice of health care providers that other Americans enjoy, and will help control costs by introducing competition to the Medicare system.

Opponents say that this plan unfairly charges higher premiums to seniors who choose to stay in traditional Medicare, which will force many seniors into HMOs and deny them their choice of doctors and hospitals.

Beneficiaries without drug coverage. Medicare beneficiaries who currently lack drug coverage are clearly the people in most urgent need of a Medicare drug benefit. However, even this group rejects the current bill and feels that Congress needs to do a better job (66% to 16%). And just 29% of these uninsured seniors say they are likely to enroll if the bill is passed.

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AARP Members. This survey sample includes 347 self-identified members of AARP. A review of their responses to the survey questions reveals that they too have a very negative view of this Medicare bill, and that AARP is out of step with its members in supporting the legislation. Here are the key findings among AARP members:

- By 65% to 18%, AARP members say that Congress should go back to work on a better prescription drug plan rather than pass the current bill.
- When we describe the drug benefit, including the premium, deductible, and coverage levels, just 26% of AARP members have a favorable response, while 66% respond unfavorably (including 41% very unfavorable).
- Eight in ten AARP members (80%) say that the bill needs to do more to prevent employers from dropping retiree coverage, when informed that the bill provides subsidies to employers but that two million retirees will likely lose their current coverage.
- The fact that the legislation is supported by President Bush and most Republicans in Congress, but opposed by most congressional Democrats, significantly reduces AARP members' confidence that this is a good Medicare plan – 48% say this makes them less confident, compared to 20% who say more confident.
- AARP members appear to be particularly concerned by provisions in the bill that increase subsidies for private health plans that provide Medicare coverage (68% have an unfavorable view).